

Message Text

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SUB: DENIAL OF ENTRY OF GHANAIAAN TRAVELERS

REF: STATE 001477 AND PREVIOUS

THE ACCRA-BASED AFRICAN-AMERICAN CULTURAL SOCIETY HAS BEEN ARRANGING, IN COOPERATION WITH THE NEW YORK BASED AFRICAN-AMERICAN INSTITUTE, CHRISTMAS AND SUMMER CHARTER FLIGHTS TO AND FROM NEWYORK FOR THE PAST TWO YEARS. DURATION OF THESE TRIPS HAD BEEN SIX WEEKS AND THE COST IS ABOUT \$400 FOR ROUND-TRIP PASSAGE. EMBASSY HAS NO BASIS FOR SUSPECTING THE BASIC GOOD INTENTIONS OF THE SOCIETY, ALTHOUGH IT WAS QUITE CLEAR AFTER THE SUMMER 1974 FLIGHTS THAT SOME OF THE PARTICIPANTS WERE USING THEIR LOW-COST ROUND TRIP ENTITLEMENT AS A ONE-WAY PASSAGE. AS A RESULT, FOR THE XMAS CHARTER, PERSONAL INTERVIEWS WITH ALL PARTICIPANTS WERE INSISTED UPON. AT THESE INTERVIEWS THE CONSULAR OFFICER PAID PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO THE APPLICANT'S TIES TO GHANA, AND TO MOTIVATION FOR THE TRAVEL.

IN THE CASES OF THE 71 GHANAIAANS WHO WERE DENIED ENTRY TO THE U.S., EVERY ONE DENIED KNOWING ANYONE IN THE U.S., AND THE REASONS GIVEN FOR WANTING TO TRAVEL VARIED WIDELY; SOME WANTED TO EXPERIENCE WINTER WEATHER, SOME PROFESSED CURIOSITY ABOUT NEW YORK, SOME SAID THEY WERE GOING BECAUSE OF THE CLUB'S GROUP DECISION, AND SO ON. EACH CAME UP WITH A PLAUSIBLE STORY OF

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FINANCING WITHIN THE GHANAIAAN SOCIAL/FAMILIAL CONTEXT,

WHEN THEIR PERSONAL RESOURCES TENDED TO MAKE THE TRIP APPEAR EXTRAVAGANT. THEREFORE, GIVEN THE ALLEGED LACK OF TIES WITH THE U.S. OF THE 71, AND THEIR ALLEGED REASONABLE TIES IN GHANA, THE CONSULAR OFFICER WAS DISPOSED TO GIVE THE APPLICANTS THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT. VISA INTERVIEWING AND ISSUANCE FOR THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN CULTURAL SOCIETY CHARTER FLIGHT BEGAN IN MID-NOVEMBER.

IT WAS ONLY A WEEK BEFORE THE FLIGHT WAS DUE TO DEPART FOR THE U.S. ON DECEMBER 21 THAT EMBASSY LEARNED THAT THE FLIGHT ORGANIZER HAD NOT OBTAINED FOREIGN EXCHANGE PERMISSION FROM THE BANK OF GHANA: THAT THE CEDIS PAID BY THE PASSENGERS COULD NOT BE CONVERTED INTO DOLLARS; THAT TRANS INTERNATIONAL AIRWAYS (WHICH HAD CHARTERED A PLANE TO THE AAI WHICH WAS TO RETURN WITH THE AACCS MEMBERS) WOULD NOT ABSORB CEDIS AND THAT ALL PLANS FOR TRAVEL WERE IN DISARRAY. BY THEN, HOWEVER, THE MAJORITY OF THE VISAS HAD ALREADY BEEN ISSUED.

EMBASSY UNDERSTANDS THAT EVENTUALLY THE PASSENGERS WERE BOOKED ON GHANA AIRWAYS TO LONDON AND THEN AIR INDIA TO NEW YORK.

FROM SUBSEQUENT DEVELOPMENTS, IT IS NOW CLEAR THAT THE APPLICANTS WERE WELL COACHED FOR THEIR INTERVIEWS, THAT MANY OF THEM DID NOT TELL THE TRUTH AND THAT THE CHARTER FLIGHT OPERATOR'S ASSERTIONS TO THE LAST MOMENT THAT THE AIRPLANE AND HOTEL BOOKINGS WERE IN ORDER WERE FALSE.

BEGINNING IMMEDIATELY, EMBASSY WILL TAKE THE FOLLOWING STEPS TO PREVENT RECURRENCE OF SUCH SCALE VISA FRAUD AND GENERALLY FURTHER TIGHTEN VISA ISSUANCE PROCEDURES;

A. CHARTER FLIGHTS FROM GHANA WILL BE DISCOURAGED FOR THE NEAR AND INTERMEDIATE FUTURE, BECAUSE OF THE PROVEN IMPOSSIBILITY OF GATHERING A PLANE LOAD OF BONAFIDE TOURISTS AT ANY ONE TIME;
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2. INDIVIDUAL APPLICATIONS FOR TOURIST/BUSINESS VISAS WILL BE EVEN MORE CLOSELY SCRUTINIZED. APPLICANTS WILL CONTINUE TO BE INTERVIEWED INDIVIDUALLY AND A SOLID DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE OF TIES IN GHANA AND/OR SOUND AND COMPELLING REASONS TO GO TO THE U.S. WILL BE INSISTED ON. BANK STATEMENTS AND INCOME TAX DECLARATIONS WILL BE REQUIRED IN DOUBTFUL CASES, STEADY JOBS AND/OR STRONG

FAMILY/TRADITIONAL/CULTURAL OBLIGATIONS WILL HAVE TO BE ESTABLISHED;

3. ROUND-TRIP TICKETS AND ADEQUATE FOREIGN EXCHANGE WILL BE REQUIRED.

THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT IS NOT ACCORDED BY INS AND EMBASSY WILL FOLLOW SUIT.

EMBASSY IN INSTITUTING MORE RIGOROUS INTERVIEW PROCEDURES WILL NOT LOSE ITS OBJECTIVITY IN SEEKING TO EVALUATE EACH CASE ON ITS MERITS. IT IS TO BE EXPECTED, HOWEVER, THAT FOLLOWING THE INTRODUCTION OF THESE NEW CRITERIA AND PROCEDURES, THE VISA REFUSAL RATE WILL AS MUCH AS DOUBLE ITS PRESENT LEVEL OF APPROXIMATELY 37 PERCENT.

THE EMBASSY WOULD WELCOME DEPARTMENT'S COMMENTS AND FURTHER GUIDANCE.

OM TO FOLLOW ON LOCAL NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF INCIDENT. BLACK

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